An Essay On Gluttony

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On Wednesday, November 21, 1991, (1) as has been my wont over the past couple of weeks, I went along to *Garfunkel's* restaurant in New Oxford Street for my main meal of the day. This is a stone's throw from the British Library, where I do a lot of my research. Of late, selected pizza restaurants in London have been putting on pizza and pasta buffets where the customer can eat all the pizza and pasta he likes for two pounds fifty pence – a bargain in anyone's language at today's prices. Anyway, back to the story.

A tall, well-built man, with perhaps a shade of a Northern accent sat at the table next to mine. When I arrived hehad already finished at least one helping of chicken risotto and marinaded chicken's wings. He went up for another, ordered, get this, a glass of water, and, when the waitress asked ifhe'd finished, replied no, he'd be going up for another yet. Which he promptly did. I finished my meal at about the same time as he finished his, in between reading his *Evening Standard*. He fiddled with some change in his pocket, which he kept in a plastic cash bag; I saw him put what I took to be a ten penny piece on the table, which I suspected was not a tip for the waitress. I stood up ready to leave, but determined that I should be behind him, so fiddled with my notebook etc while he gathered his rucksack, made his way up to the counter immediately ahead of me and, sure enough, tendered the exact amount, then, taking a mint from the tray on the counter, walked out of the restaurant without even a thank you and made off up towards Holborn. (2)

I don't know what the staff thought of him, but I thought "What a wanker!" Which brings me in a roundabout way to the subject of gluttony. The great bane of my life has been work, (the evils of which I will debate elsewhere), while its greatest joy has been eating. I once said during the course of an interview , "I love food more than I love women." To which my companion replied that he for one considered this a no-contest. (3)

Right from a very early age I've been a glutton, I used to (and still do to some extent) eat like a horse. In addition to this, I have always absolutely hated exercise, any sort of exercise, although over the years I have made sincere but spasmodic attempts to knock myself into some sort of shape. Fortunately, in spite of being rather big-boned and standing some six feet tall, I must have possessed a peculiar metabolism, because no matter how many Calories I consumed, I never seemed to put on weight. And consume them I did, mostly the wrong kinds of food.

I ate doner kebab, sweets, puddings, and at one time regularly dined off bacon, fried eggs, tinned or fried tomatoes, baked beans, heavily buttered bread, and chips with everything. Including fish, Kentucky fried chicken, and burgers! Needless to say, however remarkable one's metabolism, that sort of thing catches up with everyone eventually. During my short sojourn in HMP Brixton in the summer of 1983, I was banged up with a couple of gypsies, one of whom insisted in working out in the cell everyday. Not holding

gypos in the highest esteem, (4) it shamed me that they could perform three sets of press ups without working up a sweat while I couldn't even do three. (Three press ups, not sets!)

I remember laying on my bunk one day and pinching a handful of flab; I hadn't realised it before, but I was fat. I had always weighed a lot, but it had never showed, until now. Later, when I was transferred to a larger cell which I shared with, among others, an overweight Greek ponce, it was even more shameful that this man, (a smoker) was physically much stronger than me and as well as press ups could do a few chins. Anyway, I resolved to do something about my upper body strength at least, and, when still banged up with the two gypsies, began working out regularly within narrow limits in the cell. Later, when I was transferred to Wandsworth, if my memory serves me correctly, when I was weighed I tipped the scales at an unimpressive 100kg, which translates as almost exactly 16 stone. The doctor took one look at me and said, "You're too fat; lose some weight."

Which I did, but not for a few months. As soon as I was transferred to Highpoint,which was a semi-open, I started running and weight training regularly. Boy, was the running bad; I've been doing it for seven and a half years now, andit still doesn't get any easier. Most of the time I have to struggle, I mean really struggle, to get through twenty minutes of virtually crawling. I should be able to run half-marathons on a regular basis with all the training I've had, or should have had, but the fact is that I've never progressed. It was the running more than anything else which enabled me to take the extra weight off. In about three months I was done to about 12 stone 7, which weight I stayed at until I got the crazy idea into my head to practice undernutrition without malnutrition *a là* Roy Walford. For further information about this fascinating subject, the reader is referred to Dr Walford's excellent book, *Maximum Lifespan*. Suffice it to say that, with great reluctance, I have decided that I must now seek other methods of cheating death, although to the best of my ability I still follow the supplementation and exercise recommendations which are an integral part of any immortalist's programme.

Anyway, by the time I queued up behind the greedy gannet in *Garfunkel's*, I was hovering around the eleven stone mark, which for me, was a considerable achievement. Actually, by carefully controlling my Calorie intake I'd managed to get down almost to welterweight, but over a period of a few weeks, I had become obsessed with food and with eating, and my weight had "ballooned" until one night before I went to bed I was up to eleven and a half stone again. Weight wise, provided you run, you can eat almost anything you like, within reason. The key phrase here is *within reason*, which clearly excludes three platesful of lasagne, pasta and chicken risotto with rice followed by a sweet in mid-afternoon; I had also developed an obsession with eating rolled oats straight from the packet, my own particular porridge mix, and flapjacks.

When did this madness start? Well, like I said before, food has been the great love of my life, so it was always latent. I think it started for real when I discovered the excellent salad bar deals offered by *Garfunkel's* and similar restaurants. In *Garfunkel's* and *Adam's Rib* restaurants, unlimited salad bar was about a fiver. This was a very recent development, but my first bout of binging actually began in the autumn of 1990, when I went up to

Blackpool to lobby the political conferences. A restaurant in Blackpool had an all you can eat menu for about eight quid, which included an enormous selection of starters, salads and sweets. If you chose the salad bar main course it was a shade over a fiver; Yours Truly would have a chicken main course or something then get stuck into the starters, salads and sweets. Then there was the fudge. I ate tons of this at Blackpool, and paid for it several times; I was never actually physically sick, but I certainly came close to it.

Back in London I started frequenting *Garfunkel's* and similar restaurants, including the excellent *Deep Pan Pizzas*. And if I had a salad bar, which was frequently, I would fill my plate up, then go back to the trolley and fill it up again. One day in the rib restaurant in Victoria, I had so much that I found it difficult to believe that the waitress, who seemed to walk around with a permanent smirk on her face had not developed this especially for me. I could imagine her whispering to the other staff: Look at this guy, what a porker! It may have been my paranoia, in fact it almost certainly was, but there is no doubt that restaurant staff do notice the big eaters and probably talk about their gastronomical habits as much as their tipping habits. I like to think I'm no slouch in this area either, although leaving a big tip probably defeats the object of filling your face for a fiver.

The day I really went over the top though was when I took a young woman I'd been working with to *Garfunkel's* in Leicester Square. As well as a double helping of salad bar piled to the roof, I shared a starter of garlic bread, and followed the whole thing with a chunk of passion cake. Shortly afterwards, the following day I think, I was diagnosed as suffering from chickenpox. I hadn't been feeling particularly hungry, yet had gone out of my way to stuff myself.

I think with me this is partly due to compulsion; I'm both a very impulsive and compulsive person, and once I get stuck into something I tend to become hooked on it. At various times I've been addicted to Elton John records, Dennis Wheatley novels, chess and, (Heaven forbid!), gambling.

Much nonsense has been written about the subject of gluttony; the white ethno-masochists are forever telling us that it's obscene that a third of the world is overweight while the other two thirds are hungry, or words to that effect. Which really is a complete load of crap. In the first place, there are plenty of obese people in the so-called Third World and more than enough hungry ones in the West. In the second place, very few people are starving. It is true that many more are malnourished, but a lot of this is due to bad eating habits. It's possible to be five stone overweight *and* to be seriously malnourished. In the third place, the assumption is usually made that the thin man is thin because the fat man is fat, which again is the most complete and utter nonsense.

The main reason we in the West produce so much more than Third World countries, racial superiority excepted, is that since *uhuru*, most of these Third World régimes have been transformed into inefficient collectivist dictatorships. There is also the perennial problem of servicing the international debt, which for all I care can be written off tomorrow,

it certainly doesn't do me any good. The latest manifestation of this one-world campaign nonsense is *Skip lunch, save a life.* – which has been endorsed by all manner of well-meaning and equally well-duped people.

Leaving all this aside however, gluttony is a vice, and very probably a sin. How do I know this? Like drink, there is a penalty to pay. With the latter it is the morning after the night before; with eating too much it is feeling bloated, sluggish, ill, or even throwing up. I must confess that although I haven't vomited for any reason for a long time, this is one experience I am willing to forgo for the rest of my life. Most every time I have over eaten I have felt either bloated or ill; recently, (yesterday in fact!), I made a resolution not to do this anymore. "Eat modestly but well" is the slogan I intend to adopt; I'm going to start by fasting tomorrow for at least two days, well fasting as best I can, but I'll keep some stewed apples in the refrigerator. I might even make another concerted attempt at Roy Walford's *undernutrition without malnutrition*. Certainly I intend to get down to welterweight again.

Gluttony: what should we do about it? An excellent piece of advice dating back to Roman times is never to get up from the table without thinking you could have eaten something more. (5)

AN ESSAY ON GLUTTONY by Alexander Baron: Notes

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(1) As far as I recall, this rant was written some time towards the end of November 1991. I gave up running on medical advice in 1996. And it goes without saying that I never got down to welterweight!

(2) A short while later exactly the same thing happened in the *Deep Pan Pizza* house in Leicester Square. Another well-built young man munched his way through at least three platesful of pasta and a glass of water, and, when he was full up, walked up to the counter, tendered the exact amount, said, “Thank you very much,” and walked out. Some people have no shame!

(3) With good reason, he was facing a number of serious criminal charges on account of his wife!

(4) Everyone seems to hate gypsies, except socialists, *anti-fascists* and other creeps. And with good reason: they are the scum of the Earth. Although I must confess that these two weren’t so bad; one of them could even read.

(5) Actually I think it was *I Claudius*, a drama series about the Roman era screened by BBC Television. If I remember correctly, this gem was imparted to Claudius himself (portrayed by Derek Jacobi) by his physician.